



June 28, 2010

Subject: Letter for the record

Re: June 17, 2010 Hearing to Review Responsible Fatherhood Programs of the Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support.

Dear Honorable Committee Members:

Northwest Family Services (NWFS) is a provider of Healthy Marriage Education programs in the Greater Portland, Oregon, metropolitan area. As part of our grant, we also partner with Multnomah County Health Department and Catholic Charities to provide services. I would like to make the following points for your considerations:

1. We have provided services to almost 19,000 participants in the past 3 ½ years. We provide services in the following areas: social marketing, high school students, pregnant and parenting teens, those considering marriage, and married couples. Our program incorporates evidence-based curricula: Connections, Within My Reach, How to Avoid Falling for a Jerk, Bringing Baby Home, and PREP. We provide healthy relationship classes for those high school youth, those considering marriage, and married couples, financial literacy classes, parent workshops, and fatherhood classes. About 85% of those we serve are low-income Latino families who would not otherwise have access to these services. We also provide services to returning veterans and their families and people who are incarcerated and their families. Our program was one that was featured in "A Review of Select Grantee Profiles and Promising Results," published by the Administration of Children and Families.

Not only do we have hundreds of compelling statements from individuals and couples who have completed our programs, we have good outcome evidence of the long-term effectiveness of these programs as documented by our independent evaluator, Tary Tobin, Ph.D., University of Oregon. While there is considerable evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of "relationship education" presented by professional staff to mainstream communities, there is little evidence in its effectiveness among the Latino community. In our demonstration project, we have been able to see that participants attending workshops improved their knowledge of and confidence in skills related to communication, conflict resolution, accessing local community social services, safe relationships, and the values associated with commitment to a healthy marriage. These gains were maintained in participants surveyed up to 14 months after leaving the program.

There is also the human element. I would like to share two stories that illustrate the benefit of these programs.

Story One. A case worker referred a married couple in their mid-twenties who have a 2 year-old son and a newborn daughter to one of our programs. Both are considered developmentally challenged. The couple's stress levels were assessed revealing dangerously high levels. The child welfare worker referred them to one of NWFS' couple's classes. The case worker spoke with the couple after attending the workshop and these are some things they said they learned "We learned it is good to take time outs when we start arguing, especially in front of the kids. We take walks when we start to yell at each other. DJ, said to find something that helps us calm down and do it when we take a time out." Two months after taking the class, the couple again took the stress test and their levels took a steep drop in the right direction. The case worker indicated that the impact this workshop had on them was the main factor that has helped keep their children in the home. In the follow-up home study report, it was reported, "The relationship and communication techniques they learned have helped to reduce stress and increase teamwork in the home. The husband is more involved in household tasks too." The husband said the following in a phone conversation with the case worker: "I am really excited about what I did the other day. Instead of getting angry and yelling in front of the kids, I went for a walk." He went on to say that he now knows what to do when he comes back to have a conversation with his wife after a time out.

Story Two. This couple came to the program because they had little trust between themselves, could not talk about it and had given up hope. They stated they have been in counseling years before and felt that now they needed help as they were drifting further apart. After one of the classes she stated, "Things are so much better. You were right, for years I did not talk about my issues... I feel so much better now that we have taken one issue at a time and worked through them." She smiled at Pete and said, "It is so much better now, we can take one issue at a time and work through it (problem solve)." Pete leaned over towards Beth's chair, smiled and then winked at her. She sat there, giggled and blushed.

2. As a community-based organization, we have been able to provide services to many individuals who would not otherwise have access to these services. In particular, we serve members of the Latino community that would not generally be served by programs offered through governmental entities. As a community-based organization we have partnered with over 150 organizations. To ensure child well-being it is extremely important to continue to make these evidence-based programs available to a wide range of participants such as youth, singles (men and women), dating, committed relationship, married, and troubled couples rather than focusing exclusively on one group such fathers or unwed parents such as is proposed by the Responsible Fatherhood program. While we provide programming on responsible fatherhood, it would be neglectful for us not to provide similar programs for the women who are in danger and damaging relationships. It would be short-sighted for us not to provide those parents in committed relationships, including marriage, with the skills they need to create a positive, productive home life.
3. With divorce rates at almost 50 percent, as a nation we continue to see the children of these failed unions too often move to poverty level with multiple risk factors. While we are not suggesting people should stay in high-risk marriages, the benefits for children

who are raised in a two-parent family are irrefutable. Divorces in this county alone cost the state and federal government approximately \$42,660,000 dollars in 2005¹. An important goal of these programs is to reduce family violence. The co-occurrence of child abuse and witnessing intimate partner violence (IPV) is relatively frequent and has a greater impact than either child abuse or witnessing IPV alone. Research studies have estimated that child abuse and IPV co-occur in 30 to 60 % of family violence cases reported to the authorities. Family violence problems are reduced through this project by raising the awareness of what a healthy relationship looks like and can be, establishing a network of proven effective resources, and serving those in most need. Not only is the environment more oriented to positive and productive relationships, but women and men are more fully equipped to choose wisely and safely and are able to maintain a healthy marriage.

4. Despite what some naysayers may purport, there has been **sufficient compelling scientific evidence to support the long-term effectiveness of healthy relationship education**. As stated previously, through our demonstration project we have seen the tremendous impact of these evidence-based programs across a broad range of participants. Rather than list all the documentation, I refer you to several sources that provide research summaries: <http://www.prepinc.com/main/Articles.aspx>; <http://www.gottman.com/57326/Research.html>; https://www.prepare-enrich.com/webapp/pe_main/mainsite/research/template/DisplaySecureContent.vm;pc=1277754996601?id=pe_main_site_content*pages*research*public*ResearchLinks.html&xlat=Y&emb_org_id=0&emb_prp_id=0&emb_unq_id=0&emb_lng_code=ENGLISH
5. We urge you to continue the funding for the Healthy Marriage Initiative project, for the sake of this country's children! While continuing, and even increasing, funding for responsible fatherhood is very noble, there is no need to also dismantle current funding strategies that support the Healthy Marriage Initiative through local community efforts.

Sincerely yours,



Rose Fuller, M.T.S.
Executive Director

¹ Schramm, David G. Individual and Social Costs of Divorce in Utah *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*, Vol. 27(1), Spring 2006